why I won't vote

ANARCHY 37

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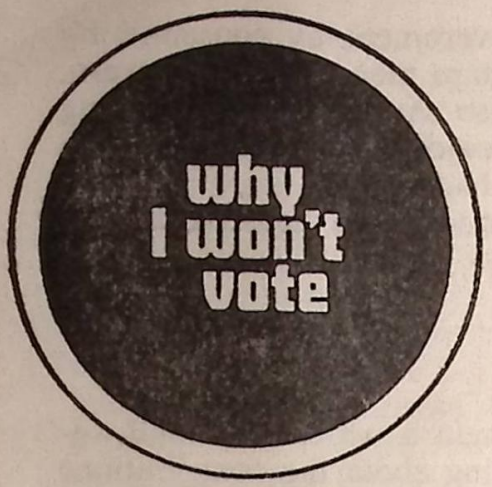

A SYMPOSIUM

1. TED KAVANAGH

Voting: *"The instrument and symbol of a freeman's power to make a fool of himself and a wreck of his country."*

THE SAYING THAT "only a fool would put a loaded gun into the hands of an idiot" is an especially apt analogy of government. An idiot (usually well-meaning) considers himself clever enough to run the affairs of a large number of people by taking a seat in parliament. A large number of people, acting like fools, vote for his party's policy then spend the next few years grumbling about the results. The error in approach is that the voter thinks that he will get what he voted for. If he could vote for those who in fact control the country, say the Governors of the Bank of England, the directors of the industrial corporations and those behind the ministries, the illusion of democracy would be more understandable.

The real centres of power lie far beyond the people's influence at elections. These remain constant whatever Party is "in power". In the terms of centralised "democracy" the only possible argument to justify voting is that marginal benefits may be gained. The state only incidentally attends to the well-being of its subjects. Its main concern is its power relation to other states, of which the most perfect expression is in war.

I am on the side of people anywhere who are prepared neither to live nor die for something that in the long run can only militate against survival and the conditions that make life worth living. Our immediate action must, by its nature, be to oppose that pathetic gesture, voting. It must be direct and direction. We can learn to live as free men and women only by organising against the condition we are in.

The Tenants Association, Consumers Association, and Direct Action in industry all provide opportunities for people to experience directing their own lives in positive ways towards positive ends.

Only by direct involvement in society can the individual hope to transform himself and his world. Freedom cannot be given, it must be taken; and the free society can only grow from experiments in the problems (ethical and organisational) of community.

Voting does not, and cannot, mean government by consent. By voting, one acts on the assumptions that certain men are fit to govern, and that a majority is necessarily right. Also should the state, acting in the name of a (frequently fictitious) majority, declare war, the individual loses the right to live, if he ever had it.

To me, voting is complicity with the State and a negative action, therefore I do not vote.

2. CHARLES RADCLIFFE

WHEN THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE *Liberation* held a which-way-shall-we-vote survey in October 1956, the alarming thing about the contributions was the combination of insight into the nature of American society and liberal totalitarianism and the startlingly naive and irresponsible courses of action proposed. The effect General Elections have on some anarchists is similarly alarming. The letters page of FREEDOM illustrates this, as the *Liberation* survey did, though it is only fair to say that the non-anarchist *Liberation* contributors were reasonably sophisticated in their stupidity.

Some people, who for four years out of five remain impeccable libertarians, seem to go mad as the General Election approaches. They ask us to vote, as though we might have some effect on the collective insanity by chosing some of the insane as leaders. We can acknowledge that there are people who cannot help wanting to make decisions for others but there is no reason why we should encourage them. Those who ask us to vote Labour forget that the 1945 government used troops to break strikes and started the independent manufacture of the British atom bomb; that parliament is a cypher and the real power in society lies elsewhere, increasingly uncontrollable and secret; that, even if real power did lie in Parliament, they should, as anarchists, reject Government and coercion in favour of direct action and mutual aid. In short they forget that anarchism is not primarily a word or a label but a way of behaving and, above all, of reacting. They forget this at a time when anarchism can be shown as a coherent and deeply felt objection to the way in which our society does things, and as an alternative to the chicanery of the " electoral fulfilment of social and democratic responsibility ". I don't believe the General Election is an opportunity to chose enemies. I oppose contemporary society rather than the people thrown to the top by it. I don't recognise the distinctions between the different brands and different packagings of the authoritarians.

I shall not vote because I believe the General Election to be marginal in our social and political life: it does not represent an opportunity to change the horse, or even the jockey, but simply to sack, and replace, a few stable lads. At a time when we should be attempting to persuade more people of the value of direct action and *ad hoc* groupings for specific ends, it is sad that some anarchists should wish to divert our energies by persuading us to follow the herd into public displays of undiscriminating lunacy. (I apologise for my intellectual

fascism, but people who behave with all the characteristics of sheep are deserving of sympathy but no more).

Liberation argued that "most electoral contests are struggles between groups that have substantial vested interests in 'office holding', between machines which provide jobs, money and prestige to fairly large numbers of people." This is true of Britain, also. The issues which divide the parties are artificial: questions of management rather than basic policy. The election is primarily ritualistic. The real issues of the day—increasing centralisation and state control, the arms race and the like—are not usually put before the people. They are not put because they cannot be put and they cannot be put because even a programme of "democratic" seizure of administrative power has no room for policy lessening State power. Even when such issues are put, they are put according to a traditional pattern, to be applauded not because they are worth applause but because applause has always been accorded them. *Liberation* analysed this ritual. Mentioning the flag waving, drum beating, exploitation of war records and the visions of the ship of State floundering on the rocks of creeping socialism it said ". . . all this serves the purpose of creating a feeling of identification, a sense of excitement and participation. Politicians and opinion makers exert strenuous efforts to fix attention on the ritual and create the impression that it is the ritual act itself—in this case the casting of the vote—which is efficacious. Voting as a result becomes an isolated, magic act set apart from the rest of life, and ceases to have any political or social meaning except as an instrument by which the *status quo* is conserved". Election pageantry serves the same purpose as Roman circuses—the beguilement of the populace. The voter is reduced to voting for dazzling smiles, clean teeth, smooth voices and firm handshakes—playing the role of a shaking puppet manipulated by the party image mongers.

The least anarchists can do in such circumstances is to make an attempt at tangling the strings so that the puppeteers find them less easy to manipulate into the correct postures. People who compromise their ideas for a liar's promise are fools and it is hard to see how such anarchists can tell other people that they reject power and government and authority, if, once every five years, they elect someone to exercise power and authority over them. It all seems rather *too* paradoxical.

I'm not convinced that witholding my vote, as such, is very constructive. I'm not convinced that the General Election is very important either. I don't think we need a change at the top—either as a change of enemy or for the health of society's sake. I'm not going to contribute to the change. I do my voting every time I get a new idea, or talk to friends about things that *really* matter, or every time that I convince someone that anarchism is a viable "here-and-now" thing. I try to cast "my whole vote, not a strip of paper merely"; I go on demonstrations—which I hate—because it's worth the effort and I write inadequate articles to convince people that there is something in anarchism. I listen to music, read books and do the shake at Jazz clubs. It doesn't sound much it seems a lot better than a five yearly compromise with the authorities.

3. JACK STEVENSON

I SHALL NOT BE VOTING IN THE NEXT ELECTION, and the reason I give is that of the old farmer who said, " At doan matter oo e votes for. Cos a government allus gits in."

Yes a government always gets in. A government which governs with the same apparatus as the government before and the government that will follow them. The police that help old ladies across the road sometimes, and put bricks in people's pockets other times. The judges that are always calling for some poor bastard to be hanged, and when you are up before them on a charge which involves principle, tell you that justice is NOT their business, they just administer the LAW. The army that is to fight the enemy that is always at the gates, and if the enemy is not at the gates, to back up the police.

I shall not be voting because I do not believe in this system I live under, called capitalism. Where one man is pitted against another, where competition is the norm and money is god. Where people sell themselves, and each other, chasing after an illusion. The illusion being that if they can gain more things, they will be better than other people. To vote for any party would merely carry this on, with my blessing.

If you believe that something is evil or stupid, it is ridiculous to take part. Government takes people's power to think and to make decisions away from them, and it never gives them back. All governments are composed of men who look down on the people that they govern with scorn. The only time the government cares what people think is at election time, when they have a vote.

Finally for the most important reason of all. The people that you elect don't rule the country. Does anyone really imagine that a man can be Chancellor of the Exchequer one day, Prime Minister the next, and something else the day after, if he really ruled the country. If he did, there would be chaos under these kinds of conditions. But they don't rule. They are the puppets, but others pull the strings: those who own the economic wealth of the country. *It doesn't matter who gets in, the capitalists will still rule.*

The crimes of all the parties that are competing at the next election are far too many to count. Others will point them out, and they will point out each others. They are all the same types of crime because they are all committed for the same reason, and usually, come to think of it, by the same people.

4. TONY GIBSON

I WON'T VOTE SIMPLY BECAUSE THE ACT OF VOTING will not accomplish anything which I would like to see accomplished. I am not baptised and I do not intend to be baptised, because I am sure that that too would be equally futile. I know plenty of people, really intelligent people, who have their children baptised and also who vote in parliamentary elections. They are prepared to justify their actions on grounds

of both reason and faith, and we must agree to differ. It would be a mistake, and a very big one, to suppose that there is any *essential* difference in the motivation which leads people to baptism and to voting.

Having said this I am aware that it would take an anthropologist from a wholly alien culture to demonstrate clearly and concisely the exact "functional" significance which baptism and voting have in our culture. The task is beyond me; I am too enmeshed in my own culture to make a wholly clear analysis of its institutions. Having raised my head above the water and announced, "I can see that it is utterly futile", I sink down below the waters again and wallow in my own anti-baptismal, anti-voting prejudice. The moment of truth is there; I can see quite clearly that both practices are beside reason and are different in kind from actions like stoking a boiler, ploughing a field, seeing a film or learning to swim. We do not judge the un-reasonable action by any practical outcome: people do not turn to Judaism if Christian baptism does not lead to desirable results, nor do they begin to vote Tory if voting Labour brings no happy outcome. They may *justify* a change of religion or political affiliation by pointing out some real or supposed defection of the sect of their choice, but the switch or allegiance tends to be brought about by such personal matters as a new girl-friend, a new job or winning the pools.

Having had my moment of truth, having grasped that baptism and voting are un-reasonable actions and lead to no intended results, I then build up my own crazy superstructure of prejudice. I'll not be baptised because I'm cussed—and I enjoy being cussed. Politicians are conceited bastards and I get a kick out of frustrating their purposes. Some people I know would like to live in Hampstead so they could vote for whoever —rascal, oaf or nonentity—whoever *opposes* Henry Brooke; but I know that Henry Brooke and his kind would be far more enraged if nobody voted at all! And the bloody insult of godparents promising all that stuff about a child before it is hardly human—and the slimy sods take care to *confirm* the kid before he is old enough to think things out for himself! "It doesn't matter who you vote for, but vote!" "It doesn't matter whom you pray to, but pray!" This is the kind of swill they would force us to swallow. When you grab them by the throat and force an argument, they retreat, they squirm, they make concessions to reason, they protest that the masses must have an over-simplified case put before them, that they personally have mental reservations, that they are entitled to a faith to cling to, something to trust.

So you see, our hypothetical anthropologist from outer space would have a grand time studying all the ramifications of the emotional reasons why I, personally, do not vote or take part in the rite of baptism. But never let it be said that I "suffer from prejudice"; I do not, for I enjoy it.

There is an old Jewish myth that if, by chance, there comes a moment, a single moment, when everyone happens to be behaving righteously simultaneously, then God had promised that we will all live in utter happiness and harmony for evermore. Our statistical friends will point out the fallacy of this hypothetical simultaneity of one kind

of action occurring among so many, so God, like many mathematicians, is only having a dry little joke at our expense. But can we look forward to a time when *no-one* votes at a general election, and therefore has to do something about creating a different sort of society? This is, of course, a myth of equal whimsicality. When the poll drops low enough, society will already have moved on to achieve new forms of political action.

We have already reached a stage of development when few people seriously care a damn whether infants are baptised or not. Our free-thinking ancestors risked very real persecution in the stand they took against the church and some success has attended their rebellion of ideas. "Of course they were right—but who cares now?", is a common attitude today among liberal minded people. Perhaps the anarchists of today who rage against the sham of parliamentary democracy will be dismissed as lightly in the future. But we, the living, thinking, protesting generation of our time, do not really care all that about the future generations who will look upon us with like patronage. What we are concerned with is *our* world. We do not like being insulted. We do not like to live in cities where monstrous lies, religious and political, appear upon the hoardings that deface our streets. We do not like to see ordinary sane people worked upon until they babble life fools under the impression that they are serious deciding "the fate of the nation". Let them support Arsenal or Spurs, Oxford or Cambridge, and they know that it is just a bit of fun, but at election time *they think they are being grown up.*

Now I come to think of it, when I was a little boy I horrified my school-mates by declaring that I just didn't care whether Oxford or Cambridge won the boat-race. I said that I didn't see that it mattered. Perhaps that is why I don't vote today.

5. RITA MILTON

THE EXASPERATED PARTING SHOT OF ONE FRUSTRATED CANVASSER, who came knocking at our door, that we should be *forced*, albeit democratically, to vote for one party or another, is typical of the confused elector. Befuddled by the great political hoax he believes that the ballot box confers upon him a say in government policies and decisions. It is argued that those who actively oppose the democratic system of "choice" are failing in their duty, and therefore do not deserve the services provided by a benevolent state.

It does not seem to have occurred to our blinkered citizen that if *his* party fails to get power it makes nonsense of the system of choice. He may support a party on the basis of its nationalisation programme, with no choice but to accept a party dedicated, for instance, to free enterprise. The fact that millions of people may be yearning for a ruling party of one political colour, but are prepared to accept one of a slightly different shade, means that a government can legislate on important issues even with a minority vote. It would seem that the majority of people feel it essential that they should be governed.

As for the over-rated social services, these are paid for out of taxation and the essential work is carried on, not by government officials, but by nurses, doctors and dustmen. But whatever government is holding power, it will never consult the voters before waging war; or ask how much of the " national income " should be spent on armaments, or even give a choice in the selection of enemies! Is their opinion sought in the shaping of laws and punishments ? Do economic priorities express the general will on the pittance paid to old age pensioners and the unemployed ?

Whoever heard of a government enquiring as to the relative importance, from any point of view, of research into welfare, disease and food production, as against research into defence problems (war), space probes and motor car production ? These are only a few of the issues which affects the lives of everyone in varying degrees, and on which governments make decisions without consulting the people who keep them in power.

The majority of people seem to hold a contradictory set of beliefs about the nature of government and their own role in relation to it. They argue that government is necessary even when they disagree with many of its policies, but say, " there is not much we can do about it ". At the same time they vote in their millions, convinced of their own importance in the shaping of national decisions. They are in fact only important as numbers, the sum of which will decide which set of rulers will govern in any way their please. The ballot box is a gigantic prop for the collective ego.

But this is not a plea for a greater measure of say in government policies. If the people expressed their real power it is doubtful if they would act differently in any significant way and there would be no substantial change.

I will not vote because I do not want to be governed; because no government can create the kind of society I want—without national boundaries, war or hunger, prisons or privilege—therefore to me, voting would be pointless and hypocritical.

I can exercise my responsibility in a positive way be refusing to take part in war or preparations for war, by refusing to be used by any government for ends which have nothing to do with the needs of mankind. I do not have to vote in order to support the positive social trends on which a free society may really be built.

If I were committed to a political party, my loyalties would be limited to that party's aims, and my right as a free agent would be thrown into the voting pot. From this position it is a small step to the concept " my country right or wrong ", inherent in the whole system of government, which by its very nature creates the divisions which set one against the other.

6. JACK ROBINSOH

Every five years, providing you have a vote
You have a choice of voting for a party
That is, for a man chosen by the party
(Who may or may not support
A policy agreed by the party)
Which *they* may or may not continue
Dependent upon circumstances, possibilities or policy
Providing they get a working majority
Always dependent upon the wishes of
our dominant allies (now or in the
future) and upon the diplomatic necessity
for continuation of foreign policy and
maintenance of existing commitments.
AND hingeing upon technical progress
and changes,
Always providing that our rulers are
wise, beneficient and sane:
we may get good government
AND always providing that YOU are not a
clergyman, a peer or insane, when you will
not be able to enjoy this privilege.
IS IT WORTH IT ?

7. PETER TURNER

DURING THIS GENERAL ELECTION YEAR, there will be a number of people who, although over the past two or three years have called themselves anarchists, will nevertheless put a cross on a ballot paper. I do not mean the anarchist who, for instance, will vote Labour because they did at least introduce the National Health Scheme, but the person who, when it finally comes to it, gives his support to a political party, the " between elections " anarchist, as he is called.

At the time of the General Election of 1955, I knew one such person very well. He called himself an anarchist, but when it came to the " Voting season ", he started talking about giving his support to the Labour Party. At that time, I was not an anarchist, but called myself a Socialist, supporting the " Left-wing " of the Labour Party. However, my friend had often talked to me about anarchism, given me his copy of FREEDOM and lent me pamphlets on the subject.

I can remember what I thought when the Labour Party came to power in 1945. To me it was the revolution, as it was to most of the kids at my school. We all hated the Tories to such an extent that on one occasion we expressed our hatred by throwing stones at cars which

displayed their posters. To me at that time, a Labour Party victory meant a free health service, no more unemployment and a say in the running of industry for the working man. Most of us had heard our fathers talk of the time before the war when, due to the scarcity of jobs, there were enough men waiting outside factories to fill any vacancies caused by sackings several times over.

In the years after 1945 it must be said that there were not very many people on the dole and we did get a free health service, at least for a time. Clause 4, the nationalisation clause, looked fine on paper. Apparently the working men were going to have a chance to run things for themselves, but in effect, it only meant changing one boss for another. Slowly I realised that the sort of society I had envisaged would never be achieved by the Labour Party, nor any other political party.

When taking up the anarchist position, I rejected all idea of voting. The whole process of voting for someone to represent you became a complete waste of time. The idea which some left wing "revolutionary" parties, such as the Independent Labour Party and the Socialist Party of Great Britain have, of winning a General Election and once in power bringing about the revolution, seems to be quite crazy to me. For one thing, if there were enough people who accepted the revolutionary programme of these parties, I am quite sure that they (the people) would not wait for victory in an election, but would carry out the revolution themselves. If on the other hand, these parties could only increase their number of votes by watering down their revolutionary programme, then, by the time that they would be able to gain a majority, their policy would have altered completely.

If you are against Government in any form, it is logical that you will boycott the election of Government, for whichever Party wins the election, nothing really alters for the electorate. There are no vast changes, no big improvements, but only more promises that if we work harder now, things will be better in the future. It is funny how we never manage to catch up with this better future.

As far as I am concerned, it matters very little to me which party is in power. What is important is that people organise themselves to achieve the things which the politicians have been promising for years. Only by ordinary people working together on an equal basis, can any real gains be made. It is more often the unofficial strikes or negotiations that gain the increases in pay and improvements in conditions, rather than the full-time officials of unions. When bad housing conditions exist or threats of increases in rents are in the offering, it is not by writing to your Member of Parliament that you get things done. He either shelves the whole thing or if he happens to put himself out, more often than not it is too late. It is only by forming your own associations that you will be able to combat these things.

It is organising on a voluntary basis, with each individual playing his or her own part, that to me is the positive alternative to voting and one which, at the same time, will lead to improvements in all spheres of our social conditions.

8. PHILIP HOLGATE

UNLIKE MANY OF MY COMRADES I am not a very enthusiastic abstentionist at elections, and I even find some anarchist anti-election propaganda embarrassing. For instance, I do not think that everyone who votes is a fool, or imagine that they are "depositing their individuality in the ballot box for five years", while in some miraculous way the reward of non-voting will somehow enable the abstainer to avoid the consequences of the fact that some government is going to rule over us for the next five years. I do not feel any emotional attachment to mere anti-parliamentarianism such as that of Guy Fawkes and his heirs who want to impose an even less free way of life on us.

I do on the other hand feel that I am on the same side as thousands of Socialists who support the Anti-Apartheid Movement, CND and the Committee of 100, Civil Liberties, and generally take the part of youth and people against authority, but who are committed either to Labour or a minority candidate, and who feel betrayed by the militant anti-electioneering of the anarchists. Moreover, since I personally dislike propaganda activities, writing articles, speaking at meetings and going on demonstrations, I would dearly like it to be true that socialism, peace and freedom could be attained by making a cross on a bit of paper, and would make mine the minute the polling booth opened.

However, after taking all the possibilities into account, I conclude that non-voting, combined with clear and relevant propaganda about why we are not voting, is the least of several evils from which we have to choose on election day.

Anarchism has had much more publicity during the past couple of years than during the preceeding decade and more people recognise it as an intelligent social movement which has nothing to do with the "bomb-thrower" myth. However, I suspect that most of them still think of anarchism in terms of an ideal free society in the future, and are reluctant to accept it as a method of getting results here and now. Possibly that is because all the socialist, communist and social credit movements are dedicated to the ultimate achievement of a stateless society, after their leaders have attained power!

What distinguishes anarchism is its insistence on the rather obvious point that if you want a free, communist society, in which social relationships are based on mutual agreement and co-operation, and the state and its authoritarianism have been banished from their parasitic and poisonous rôle, then the only sensible way to carry on is to start working towards your goal here and now.

Supporters of political parties do not expect their parties to win at the first election they contest. They are content to vote for them even when it is hopeless, with the idea of building for the future, knowing that, say, the growth of the Labour Party is bound to modify the policy of the Tories and so on. Nor do they expect the entire programme of their parties to be implemented in a single act, but they welcome reforms here and there.

In a way, the anarchist case against voting for anyone is analogous. We support all kinds of movements whose aims are partial or reformist, provided they are the kind of movements that awaken and develop people's sense of importance and responsibility, their desire and ability to co-operate on as wide and profound a scale as possible without creating, and submitting to, any corrupting authority. The files of FREEDOM and ANARCHY will witness to our advocacy of housing associations, progressive schools, community living, shop stewards' movements, direct action against military plans and housing evictions. All these activities can achieve their immediate objects, and they can build a sense of independence among people who participate in them. They achieve some concrete results and suffer from many limitations, but most readers of ANARCHY will agree that the stronger these independent movements are, the freer will be the people and the more restraints will be imposed on the state.

At the same time, while we give as much support as possible to these positive movements, we should not forget the virtues of good healthy negativeness. We want to get rid of the state, and the weaker we can render it, so that it dosn't feel secure in launching out into military adventures, supporting employers against workers, introducing more repressive legislation against freedom of expression and union activity, the better off we will be. With that in mind, the most effective reply to the state on election day would be massive abstention, telling whatever government that was formed that they did not represent the people and that the people had no intention of lying down and being ruled in the interests of power politics and capitalism. It certainly won't happen at this election, and it won't happen all of a sudden, but as I suggested above, like any other social movement, anarchism has to work gradually towards its aims.

Therefore, while I can sympathise with those who feel that the tiny differences between what a Labour government might do and what the Tories might do, justify trying to help the former into office, I consider the building up of a strong anti-authoritarian, anti-state movement of far greater importance, not just to satisfy some abstract ideological ways of thought but in terms of hard day-to-day reality.

So it will be two fingers and not a cross, on election day.

> The strength of the old order lies not so much in political power as in the fact that it is generally approved. We must influence men so that this approval may cease.
>
> —ALEXANDER HERZEN

Vagrants

ADRIAN CUNNINGHAM

BRITAIN IN THE SIXTIES—VAGRANCY by Philip O'Connor. (Penguin Books 3s. 6d.)

> "Archaeologists interpret past civilizations by what they threw away. What contemporary society rejects is equally revealing to the sociologist."
>
> ENID MILLS.

MUCH WRITING AND DISCUSSION OF POVERTY *is* open to considerable confusion through a failure to define terms. For a basic distinction needs to be kept in mind (though admittedly it is not easy to do this in practice) between voluntary poverty and destitution, between the poor who are *outsiders* and the poor who are *outcasts*. The former includes all who embrace poverty voluntarily, either to facilitate a mission or simply because they reject the competition and violence inherent in the accumulation of wealth. Thus the followers of St. Francis, the *Catholic Worker*, bohemians and beatniks all fall into one broad general category. They are outsiders. So much indiscriminate abuse is levelled at advocates of voluntary poverty that it is worth sorting out those who talk it to keep the poor content and those who live it to more fitly help the poor.

Destitution on the other hand, can be taken as the condition of all those who are *compelled* to live below a reasonable standard of decent human existence, it thus includes many of the aged, the homeless, the unemployed, and at the very bottom, the tramp. Both the willing and unwilling poor can be called vagrant, but the distinction is vital.

A further distinction needs to be made between the subjective and objective significance of vagrancy for this is the source of much sentimentality, and only serves to reinforce our social negligence. Objectively, the tramp may be an occasion of mystic awe, as in Wordsworth, or an occasion of generosity as in many religious traditions. Or he may be, as Philip O'Connor thinks, an indication of the future society in his rejection of employment and his opportunities for contemplative activity. "The parasite is an intimation of this glorious future; in the soul of the

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parasite is something so rarely delicate that few have deciphered it, this positive delicacy of inaction, this flower of flowers." (p.34). Or he may be taken as an obvious and critical reflection of the material and psychological stresses of our civilization. But all these ideas are what the *observer* makes of the tramp's condition. The subjective facts, the actual feelings and experiences of tramps themselves, are far more grim, inhuman and commonplace. Powerful correctives to any romanticizing are Jack London's "People of the Abyss" (1907) (recommended to me by a tramp) and Orwell's "Down and Out in Paris and London" (1933)[1]; the social framework and conditions have, of course, changed, but they are both *still* (!) relevant on the basic misery of what it feels like to be a tramp.

"Vagrancy" includes many facts and details from interviews which make this obvious but they are so shot through with the author's own curious ideas, and the book is written in such a jumbled style that often no definite or useful impression is left. He gets off to a bad start by calling Christ a "propertyless vagrant." Christ wandered for a purpose and the defining characteristic of the vagrancy I encountered was purposeless and meaningless. Admittedly he limits himself to describing the "ethos" of vagrancy, and what he says may be true of a rapidly diminishing number of "wayfarers," but it bears little relation to the large and predominantly static down and out populations of the large cities. With 10,000 men in London alone living in Salvation Army hostels, Rowtons, etc., and more than 1,000 sleeping rough through the winter, one hoped a Penguin Special would provide more detailed sociological information on a subject which researchers and local authorities have so far ignored. But, half a loaf . . . .

These distinctions and reservations in mind, however, what is this ethos ?

Basically, the vagrant, as outsider and outcast, presents a challenge both to the upholders of bourgeois values and also to those who believe that affluence, whether capitalist or socialist, and state welfare will undercut the roots of social ills. A challenge that is evaded, with varying degrees of hypocrisy, by both. The tramp is despised because he is unable to be competitive. It is not only because he "won't work" (on this point O'Connor makes a useful distinction between work, which the tramp wants, and employment, which he can't stand, pp.61-3), all too often the attitude of those who do at least make some effort to provide help is that of "making a man of them again," "giving them self-respect." And here one comes at the roots of the fear of vagrancy and the punitive desire marked by centuries of legislation. Tramps either cannot or will not live a life of self-help, the cornerstone of English bourgeois morality—an interesting study could be made of the roots of this idea in English thought and social life, it seems to have no class boundary. The vagrant is hated because he demonstrates that self-help is not universal, he poses a question that current society forbids and answers by a punitive reflex. More so with the tramp than the criminal who co-operates by default in private enterprise. "The doctrine of free-will is social blackmail levelled at the incompetent poor: their culpability was the 'enterprising' rich man's virtue . . . the

get up. Tramps bear the whole brunt of our social ills and, being the least articulate of the outcasts, the machinery of the welfare state, geared as it is to verbal intelligence and the ability to understand complex regulations and procedures, "looks like a ladder the bottom rungs of which are missing" (Jeremy Sandford). In all the vagrants I met the only common background factor was some dislocation of family life, precipitating a crisis they were unable to cope with either materially or psychologically; then with or without the aid of alcoholism they steadily drift into and decline through the various "stages" of vagrancy. In London, and this is probably true of most big cities, men with no fixed abode are roughly divisible into: the temporarily unemployed, seasonal or migrant workers, fruit pickers, casual labourers; those who can get NAB money and afford 4s. a night for a hostel; those who either spend the money on the more urgent needs of drinking, or get NAB money only periodically; those without NAB money who may not spend a night under cover or get a hot meal in weeks; and lastly those who are 90 per cent of the time too drunk to have much awareness at all. One man I knew for over six months had an effective vocabulary of a dozen words, with only occasional periods of lucidity, the only fully intelligible thing I remember was a constant request for someone to shoot him.

And the direction is invariably downward, whether they were forced by circumstance or perhaps took to tramping of their own accord; all are trapped in the spiral and very few ever claim to enjoy it. There is the spiral of getting clothes from the Crypt or a Church Army place, for by the time a man has a jacket his shoes have worn through; he finally gets the shoes and a couple of weeks of skippering (sleping out) have reduced the jacket to rags. The changes of getting a complete decent outfit are pretty slim. Similarly, if he manages to get a casual job, months of malnutrition and heavy drinking result in his being physically incapable of reaching the work quota; he either loses the job or treats his friends on his first wages and he is "steamed up" for a couple of days. Again, there is the difficulty of filling in the requisite forms for assurance benefit, or getting medical attention (bronchitis, pneumonia and leg ulcers being particularly common). From time to time local NAB offices or simply officials turn a man away as a matter of course, or work the illegal (but effective) dodge of saying "no money without permanent address." And of course if a man hasn't got an address he gets no money, if he has no money he can't get an address . . .

Given these kind of conditions, and the "interlocking of problems in the subculture of poverty"—ill health, malnutrition, inadequate clothing, frequent mental instability, inability to communicate, social isolation, and in particular sexual isolation (with the exception of a very few, it is quite impossible for a down and out to have any kind of relation, even conversational, with women)—given such conditions, drink is the obvious and often the only panacea. Spirits if possible, or cider or VP wine mixed with methylated or surgical spirits, or as a last resort some sort of intoxicant can be made from shoe polish and disinfectant. Overcrowded mental hospitals are unwilling to take

vagrants, and more than once where they have the man has tired of waiting and is either completely stoned or has simply moved on. Even if he gets treatment of some kind, there is no form of after care, he inevitably returns to the city if only to find work, and the whole cycle starts again.

Perhaps it would help to give some random extracts from notes I kept:

S. Aged 43, deserted Irish Army 1940, joined British Army. Demobbed in London. Labourer, has moved to Dover on occasion for casual work. Alcoholic since 1948, on surgical since 1960. No NAB. Wife in Holloway, 5 children in 3 council homes. No regular work in 5 years. Shares with prostitute. Skippering for two years.

T. 30-35. Skilled machine grinder. Came from Dublin for work. Marriage broke up before Christmas 1961, not previously a heavy drinker. Sometimes does a week's work but gets depressed, short sentence for being drunk. Now alcoholic, skippering. Barred at Cromwell Road NAB under no address dodge.

A. Army at 19, then with colonial police in India. Reasonably good health, drinks irregularly, occasionally works at Simpsons (washing-up or kitchen hand in big hotels and restaurants often crops up as a casual job). Finds it better to stay alone, doesn't get on with other vagrants. Infrequent hot meals but finds people leave plenty of scraps in litter bins outside the Zoo! Has been barred from washing facilities in WCs.

Beyond one's immediate experience, facts and statistics are hard to come by. One source used by O'Connor is the NAB annual report, but this only covers men who attend local authority reception centres. These are generally unpopular, there is compulsory delousing, it is difficult to get in after 7 p.m. or out before 11 a.m., after a few chores, and they tend to be a good distance away—the one in London is at Gordon Road, Peckham, holding 250 men. Centres can only be used once a month unless a man is able to prove he is looking for work, in which case he can stay until he finds work, and from then on pays a minimum of 37/6 per week. Average nightly attendance at centres has varied as follows:

1922	1938	1960
11,045	16,000	1,394

and the number of centres declined,

1938	1950	1960
300	100	100

Salvation Army hostels show a much slower decline; in 1907 they took an average of 20,000 per night, and figures for 1960 were only just half, 10,000. (Jack London quotes an horrific increase from the Registrar General Report for 1886 to show that of 81,951 deaths in London, 9,909 were in work houses, i.e. one person in nine died in the work-house.)

A survey of some 2,000 men in reception centres on 6th December, 1960, produced the following figures, which should be taken only as rough guides, many facts being simply what the untrained officer could

note. The majority fell into the middle age group:

	Age	%
below	30	15%
	30—39	24%
	40—49	28%
	50—64	28%
	65+	5%

More than half had been tramping for upwards of two years, 74% were bachelors, 11% were unfit for work, 18% had some physical disability, and 9% showed signs of evident instability. My own guess is that of those who have been vagrant for two years or more about half suffer from some sort of mental illness. No amount of facts, even reliable facts, can convey the actuality and for that one only has to keep one's eyes open, around Charing Cross when a missionary coffee stall turns up, at the benches opposite the Old Vic, queueing for hours in Fleet Street in the early hours of Sunday morning on the chance of being taken on for selling papers, outside Euston Station, anywhere.

Official policy towards tramps remained virtually unchanged from the 14th century to the early 20th. It has always been punitive ; partly for the psychological reasons noted above, partly as a result of economic meanness in an area where there can be no complaints, partly for fear that by providing a decent standard of existence for its outcasts society would encourage idleness. This last received its classic formulation in the 19th century—" The situation of the pauper must cease to be really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourers of the lowest class." This principle of less eligibility is perhaps not so constitutionally obvious since 1945, but it remains as an undercurrent in any NAB report, e.g. 1960, "The earlier that a man's inclination to idleness and the reason for it can be identified, the greater the chance of success in returning him to a working life." In this connection it is worth recalling the Solidarity pamphlet on Newington Lodge which demonstrated how conditions were deliberately kept at an inhumanly low level by the L.C.C. to encourage the occupants to get out and find themselves somewhere to live.[2]

The official attitude can produce a hidden, or fringe vagrancy, which is only registered when eligibilty is rapidly extended, the clearest case being the rise and fall in figures for attendance at casual wards for 1846-9. The average for 1846 was 6,000; the following year a test case was brought, and the ruling given that no destitute person could be refused admission. The figure more than doubled immediately to reach 14,000 in 1848. The authorities hurriedly reclarified the law to exclude those whom the gate-keeper considered idle, and by 1849 the figure had dropped to 4,000, that is, 2,000 less than before the test case[3]! Exactly a century later with the 1948 National Assistance Act, applications for a night's lodging at reception centres doubled, the rise was then checked by prosecution under section 51 of the Act for "failure to maintain," and by 1950, applications dropped by a quarter. The

sharp rise following an extension of relief services may point to a considerable fringe vagrancy not covered by any available figures.

It is a paradox of our society that for those who permanently have no fixed abode the best times are periods of slump, for they then share in the mass relief programmes for the temporarily unemployed which are a product of economic crisis. A booming economy, however, immediately reverse this position, and relief is wound up except for the NAB and voluntary organizations. It is indicative of the amount of pressure on these organizations that the volume of work involving sociail and family problems at St. Martin's in the Fields has caused them to close down their vagrants' shelter completely. Again, by the inevitable logic of profits and institutions, Rowton Houses are now "an interesting speculation at a reasonable yield" as one Sunday paper economist put it. Originally built to alleviate the needs of the homeless they are being converted into "working men's hotels," that at Kings Cross now being called the Mount Pleasant Hotel with a consequent rise from 4/- to 21/- as the minimum charge. Five other Rowtons with 3,000 beds are also due for development. The director of the company claims a decline in the numbers attending, but as Jeremy Sandford pointed out at the time the users themselves deny this and "House Full" signs are common (*Observer*).

Since the peak period of the 30's the type of problem raised by vagrancy has changed as well as the numbers of the tramps. The predominant number then were normally employable men out of a job for months at a time, while now the major question is one of mental and emotional stability; the inability to enter social relations; today, down and outs are by and large unemployable. I am not suggesting that either quality is desirable, and agree with O'Connor that rehabilitation, trying to tame a man and fit him back into a competitive society the stresses and strains of which produced his problem in the first place, is absurd. But I cannot agree with his rejection of therapeutic methods. The only way out of the absolute misery of the vagrant's life is by making some sort of modus vivendi, simply helping a man cope with his problem, and this is only possible in terms of constant personal contact. But everything in the vagrant world is in a state of permanent stalemate, and many attempts to make a breakthrough are frustrated by the balancing tensions of unorthodox ideas and the lack of money and people to implement them.

St. Botolph's Crypt Club is the nearest I can imagine to providing the sort of assistance that is required. Some of the workers are religious, the atmosphere of the place however is non-religious and non-authoritarian (the only rule prohibits drinking inside the crypt—as much a protection against police interference as the chances of a riot in confined space). It was a matter of simple observation that if a tramp felt he had let you down, he would immediately feel guilt exacerbating his inhibition and isolation. Paternalist mateyness can only produce hatred, cringing or guilt; it is an extension of the threatened withdrawal of affection that parents can use to control their children (cf Ian Stuart's article in ANARCHY 32), and with their low sense of personal assertiveness tramps are particularly vulnerable to this form of bullying. Of course,

permissiveness produced constant disappointments, a continued testing of how much we'd put up with. It was only when a man realized that friendship did not depend on good conduct but was an interest in him for his own sake, that we were even at the beginning of being of some real help. Without a formal committee, religious background, records, constitution and rules it was difficult to obtain financial support, and attempting to keep pace with the material demands alone was sufficient to occupy everyone's energy: trying to feed 30 to 60 men each day on 10/- worth of vegetable soup, bread, butter and tea; getting forms filled in; weighing one need against another in allocating four bed tickets per night, sorting out old clothes, providing bandages, iodine, etc. There was little time left for personal contact with more than two or three.

Libertarian, permissive and co-operative techniques are the only ones offering any help to the vagrant in living his own life again, but only the charities and authorities have the necessary cash . . . Meanwhile this winter, 10,000 men are dossing in London alone and over 1,000 sleeping in the open.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Both recently re-issued as paperbacks by Panther & Penguin Books respectively.
2. HOMELESS! Solidarity pamphlet No. 12.
3. 'J. Stuart Whitley, NEW SOCIETY 27/12/62.

Squawks of a citizen

PAUL GOODMAN'S article is extracted from his book *The Society I Live in is Mine* (Horizon Press, New York, $3.95) which is a collection of letters to editors, and to public officials, book reviews and speeches of the last few years. They express protest, indignation or constructive proposals on themes which affect him as a citizen; war preparation and the bomb, the power of money, social and sexual suppression, education, town planning and "the failure of intellect."

"The society I live in is mine," declares Goodman, "open to my voice and action, or I do not live there at all. The government, the school board, the church, the university, the world of publishing and communications, are my agencies as a citizen. To the extent that they are *not* my agencies, at least open to my voice and action, I am entirely in revolutionary opposition to them and I think they should be wiped off the slate."

"It is appalling how few people regard themselves as citizens, as society-makers, in this existential sense. Rather, people seem to take society as a pre-established machinery of institutions and authorities, and they take themselves as I don't know what, some kind of individuals "in" society, whatever that means. Such a view is dangerous, because it must result in a *few* people being society-makers and exercising power over the rest. Not even if these few—managers, governors, and so forth—were intelligent or had some other excellence, the situation would be disastrous, since a few do not, in sheer quantity, have enough mind, enough attentiveness and concern, to deal with the multifarious problems of society . . . . There is no remedy except large numbers of authentic citizens, alert, concerned, intervening, deciding on all issues and at all levels."

Lapse of community

PAUL GOODMAN

*I was asked to give a talk in Professor William Kolb's seminar on the sociology of city-planning, at Carleton College. The following is the edited *tape of the talk and of the subsequent discussion, as printed in the* CARLETON MISCELLANY, *Summer* 1962. *The more interesting part is, certainly, the discussion, for the students were bright and pugnacious.*

ALL AREAS OF PLANNING MUST BE TREATED AS A UNITY. It can't be helped. If you're going to do any good physical or social planning, you'll find the areas *will* be unified because the human animals are unified. I'm a pretty ignorant man. I have, except perhaps as a literary critic, no special knowledge. I am, though, a little bit of a philosopher. And what I see is just the fact that things hang together and you can't be very wise unless you are willing to let them hang together.

I'll give you an instance of unwisdom in recent planning literature, in Jane Jacobs' new book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities.* In that book an astonishing amount of space is devoted to the fact that the streets are not safe, and to what must be done to make them safe. I'd been at conventions with Jane and had heard her on this subject, and I assumed that she was an old maid. But that isn't true; she's married and has two children. Now about a third of her book is devoted to physical arrangements to make streets safe, for example adequate lighting, but her most serious suggestion is that things must be arranged so that everybody on the street is always under some sort of social surveillance. So she's against parks and housing projects with back alleys, etc. I myself would find being under social serveillance quite unlivable, and without alleys and basements how will kids, who can't afford hotels, ever have sex? But those are the disadvantages; the question is are there advantages? If she imagines that the lack of safety in New York and Chicago can be cured by some kind of physical planning for social surveillance, she's quite mistaken.

Recently James Conant, who has been investigating the school system of America, came out with a new book, *Slums and Suburbs,* in which he speaks of the social dynamite of our big cities, stored up by a combination of unemployment, especially of negroes, unrealistic school programmes, discrimination by employers and labour unions. He suggests various remedies, in the schools and in serving the drop-outs.

* We have had to condense it a little. ED.

Now this kind of approach, if it were seriously implemented, which it won't be, *might* do something about safety on the city streets. But arranging the buildings and the entrances for continual social surveillance is not going to do anything for safety. The fact that people are watching does not prevent crime, it merely inhibits freedom. Under dynamite circumstances, a white man can walk down a street or into a hall, or a coloured man can walk down a street in Birmingham, Alabama, and under perfect social surveillance get himself mugged, robbed, or beat up. And all the surveyors will sit back and couldn't care less. No amount of physical planning is going to help that. You have to look at the problem as a problem of human motives.

You can hope for too much from physical planning. What physical planning can do is to facilitate, to actualise, to perfect underlying social motives that are valuable. If there is a valuable friendliness among people, then it's possible by a good campus to make a better school. But if there's no real community of faculty and students, and no real interest in real studies, you will not create a school spirit by planning a campus. I think this isn't said enough, though it seems to be such a simple thing. Planning is done in isolation from what's being planned for, and from the social, economic, and political conditions that prevail. In such a case the ideal plan becomes a sort of trap, a trap even worse than no plan.

At present in New York City, in Boston, even Cleveland, certainly Chicago, the big problem for social planning is the fact of segregation, the dis-integrating of neighbourhoods. It's happened this way: There's tremendous migration from the south to a certain number of northern cities, especially in the east. The migrants are for the most part young people, as migrants almost always are. These young people have children. Thats the nature of young people. At the same time that they are coming to the city, there's an emigration of young, middle-class white people to the suburbs. These too are the ones who have the children. The result is that although the population is not quite 50 per cent coloured, a much greater proportion of the children are coloured. So the schools are 70, 90, 100 per cent segregated. For some reason the others, the young whites, have fled to the suburbs. It's not precise what they are fleeing *from*, but they are the cause of the *de facto* segregation. Forty years ago, when I was a boy in New York, we had integrated schools, and now we don't, and its the same in other large cities of the north. The conditions in the coloured areas are bad and both confirm and breed prejudice in the inhabitants of those areas just as the whites are prejudiced. Then all the physical planning in the world will not make the streets safe. Further, ill-considered bureaucratic efforts to change these conditions may make then worse. Consider housing, for example. In New York City public housing, if your income rises above a certain figure, you have to move out. There couldn't be a more stupid notion. The people in the neighbourhood who apparently can make a go of it even in this society, and might help others to, are forced out. It takes real bureaucrats to think of this: they have to satisfy certain administrative criteria, so the people housed have to be

poor and take a means test.

Obviously if you mean to do any planning to undo segregation, and dangerous streets, you must try to build in *mixtures*. The public housing must be built for three classes, four classes.

There's another problem in our housing projects that you out here wouldn't know about. There are *moral* criteria for living in public housing. If a woman has too many men, she is judged immoral and out she goes. Now it is simply a fact that the mores of many urban poor are not middle-class. They are not, in many cases, going to live in little families of man, wife and children. Not uncommonly a woman will have had several children by several different men. Or the woman might go out and work—there is no breadwinning man—and the children are then called in the school jargon "latchkey children", they return after school and let themselves in with their keys. Now these are simply facts. But the housing is planned in terms of middle-class conventions for people who do not have these conventions. It isn't a matter of morals at all; middle-class morals are not the only morals.

Therefore I'm beginning to recommend as a feature of public housing the experiment of a dormitory for the teenagers, beginning, say, at age 11. The teenagers will live in the dormitory as in a youth house in primitive societies. At the same time, their parents live in the same housing. The kids have some place to go for solace and advice, and dinner. They might eat breakfast in the dormitory, lunch at school, and dinner with mama. Then, if mama has a new gentleman home, less hatred might be generated. If these are the facts of life, planning must be adapted to the facts and yet try to bring out something new. In my opinion, this dormitory arrangement would be preferable for the middle class too. Indeed, I wouldn't advise it for anybody unless I thought it would be good for me and my children.

Let's move on. I have started with the smaller units of planning, housing. Let us move to neighbourhoods. As you know, most of the advanced and sociologically minded city-planners of the last generation have latched on to neighbourhood planning as the right thing. There has been a resurgence of interest in community, the face-to-face group, as the basis for diminishing the anomie and loneliness of mass society—and one of the crimes of big slum-clearance and big public housing has been the disruption of neighbourhood ties. But this attitude too can become mechanical. It is felt that the meeting together of people in shopping-centres, for example, will take away the blight of the super-metropolis and megalopolis.

But to make neighbourhood planning work, the physical planning is only trivially important compared to the really important thing: neighbourhood function. And in order to make any community-function work as community, you must give the community authority, power to make decisions. The only way you will ever get any neighbourhood planning that amounts to anything is to dare to decentralise the administration and allow local initiative. Of course you can't *give* initiative; but you can give people the right to exercise initiative and make crucial

decisions. (It is said that one person in ten is a "leader". That is enough, if the others have face-to-face access to him).

Consider it this way: it is not the bigness of cities that does the damage of anomie; for in principle, a population of 6,000,000 can be regarded as 2,000 neighbourhoods of 3,000, with a local town-hall, for health, education, sanitation, police, etc. Naturally many functions require centralisation, e.g. transit; but many functions can be efficiently decentralised to the neighbourhoods.

Let me develop one, the school system. In New York City we are supposed to have a pretty good system. It is dreadful. But however bad it is academically, administratively it is absurd.

Have you heard of the rat school? The principal is a friend of mine, Elliott Shapiro. He's a saintly type and picked that school because it was one of the worst. Among other things, lots of rats. So he squawked and finally the Mayor appeared. Sure enough, he walked into the building and out jumped a rat right at the Mayor, and there was a picture of it in the *Times*! "This must be attended to immediately!" Top priority. This was in March. In July came the workmen and left their cans of paint. They left their cement to repair the courtyard. But all summer no work was done. School began the second week in September. The third week came the workmen, with a pneumatic drill in the courtyard. You coldn't hold classes because you couldn't hear. The paint dripped on your head, the fumes were sickening. So Elliott, who is very bold, called off classes, and told the children to go home and tell their mothers that school was off because the city hadn't repaired the school in time, and he would not keep children in a dangerous school. The mothers then organised a strike. The city objected to the strike, but finally it got so bad that the city—an election was coming up—had to give in. Children were bussed to other schools, workmen were paid for overtime. Fine. But back in March, two Marches ago, three Marches ago, Elliott could have picked up a phone, called an exterminator in the neighbourhood, and said, "Get rid of those damned rats and bill the city." But if he'd done that, he would have landed in the penitentiary, for spending the public money. You have to go through Livingston Street, that's the Board of Education, and when Livingston Street has agreed to get rid of rats, you proceed to the Board of Estimate. Thing like that takes time.

Conceive of the advantages and the dangers of the opposite: the tax money going to the Parent Teacher Association, for instance, to make the kind of school they want to make, with the Central Board of Education preserving, let us say, minimum standards and seeing to it that every neighbourhood gets a reasonable share of money, so the rich neighbourhoods don't hog it all. It seems to me that this is perfectly feasible. If it were established in the New York school system tomorrow, of course, there would be chaos, but even that mightn't be so bad. Some schools would be perfectly terrible, some would be pure John Birch. On the other hand, some would be excellent. (A surprising number of intelligent people might join a PTA if it had any power). At present

there are no excellent schools in our public system. None. You can't have a good school if you can't experiment more freely than is allowed. Given a completely decentralised system, there might be schools worse than our worst. I doubt it but it's possible: all the children might die of cholera. But then people would be making their own mistakes and they'd have to learn real fast! The Board might well advise them and say, "What you're doing won't work. The kids will never get into high school or college." The members of the PTA might get smarter.

In fact, this is how the settlement houses are run. Neighbourhood gang work and other kinds of social work are neighbourhood projects invented by the project leaders in the settlement houses. They call on the city when they want help. (They don't always get it, but that's the theory anyway.) So far as we have community spirit in our New York neighbourhoods, these settlement houses have been a great factor. Clearly localised schools would be an even greater factor.

Even more important, perhaps, are housing and urban renewal. They too could be localised. A reasonable method would be to invite people from a university to make alternative sets of plans for a neighbourhood. Perhaps by competition, with a board of architects, etc., to rule out the plans that are just impossible. Perhaps six workable plans will remain. Then you educate people by inviting them to the school. You have a party or bazaar; you explain the plans, and point up the features of this one and that one. You carry on communication for six months, a year. Perhaps the plans become a local political issue. Finally, a vote—whatever they choose they get. No faking. Usually they won't choose the best. How could they possibly? But they'll choose something that will almost surely be better, more fitting their local needs, that what some bureaucrat in the City Planning Commission of New York City will give them. By giving the neighbourhoods the power to decide, I think you will eventually get real neighbourhoods, and you might even get good plans.

And let me now make a big jump, to the final topic I'd like to discuss. In my opinion, one of the chief things we have to do in order to get better *urban* planning is to reverse somewhat the trend from country to city. Consider. The cities have always been the place where high culture has grown and flourished. For obvious reasons. People mix, crafts and groups mix; there's trade, and people come from far places to trade. The people of the city hear other languages, customs, philosophies, and sciences. This sharpens intelligence. But I don't think it's sufficiently remembered that these exciting cities have always had a definite limit and a pretty close relationship with a countryside. It's one thing to live in a city when you have country cousins whom you visit and they visit you. It's another thing to live in a 600 mile conurbation when you can go and go and go and never get out of the suburbs that have the same city-culture in a more boring form. The city must have a stopping point. Then you might have an entity and begin to improve its centre. Think of the money we've spent in New York on escape highways to Long Island, Westchester, Westport in Connecticut, etc. Billions of dollars. And think if we spent the greater part of this

money on improving the centre, saying, " Here, this is the limit of the city. Around here we'll have some good thick forests for a little way. And after the forest, farms, with cows."

The problem then is how to get people to live on the farms with the cows. Just the reverse is happening. Everybody goes away from the farms that have the cows into the city. The reason, I think, is pretty simple. Besides the fact that there's not enough cash, the farm in some ways is dull. Now the modern city is even duller, but the farmboy doesn't know that. It's exciting when he first arrives. It's importantly a question of morals, of impossible morals in the farm community. The kind of moral repression that is possible, when, as was the case, temptations remained in the unconscious and were never thought of, is impossible when the contents have been thought of. For moral repression then becomes plain inhibition, and nobody can lead an inhibited life. You can't take people with certain repressive moral customs and surround them with an urban culture in which quite different things are acceptable and advertised—the TV, the movies, and all the rest of it—and expect that those people are going to be content and happy as they were, they are continually stimulated, the old repression breaks down, and then the country life becomes unacceptable and the young go to the city. Of course they do.

They make a mistake, because the place they go to may be freer in some respects, but it doesn't have many other desirable qualities. And th quality of city life is made dull when it is no longer related to the country. We must then find some way to build new patterns of life in the country and the small town and so diminsh the urban migration.

Take your Northfield, for example. If new industries were brought in, so there'd be more cash, especially if they were interesting industries, then you'd have industry, a farming community, and the two colleges. That could be a very exciting community if in fact everybody shared in all three activities. If every family had one boy or girl in the college, and one in the factory, and one on the farm, and yet they all lived together, as you can in a place of this size, you would begin to get a very interesting life with cross fertilisation of ideas, a life which, on the whole, would be better than in an urban spread. That kind of pattern might help to stop the urban migration, and perhaps partly reverse it. I've talked enough.

QUESTION: You have been called a utopian thinker on the ground that the things you propose cannot conceivably be achieved. How do you move in the direction of getting these things done ?

ANSWER: If any of these things are to be accomplished they must be accomplished by pressure. The important thing is to try to make the unit of pressure the small local unit, the renewal of which is one of the things you're trying to accomplish. In trying to achieve decentralisation in the city, for example, it is the settlement house, the school, the

neighbourhood that should be exercising the pressure, not the election district, the aim being that the neighbourhood finally *becomes* the election district.

Q. If the desire for power corrupts, as well as power, and if the neighbourhood settlement house had charge of its own budget, and the budget was public money, wouldn't your neighbours like to climb from their place in the hierarchy to the place which would inevitably be there, the tax collector's office and the disbursement office at the top ?

A. No, no, I don't think so. I don't think so because I think the corruptibility of mankind is caused by frustration. People don't want power as such. What they want is activity. They want to actualise potentialities, and insofar as they want power they want it in order to make decisions, in order to act. Now in a situation when more and more rights to make decisions are taken away from people, there gets to be more and more need to identify with big decision makers. But in a family, for instance, where decision making remains, isn't there pretty much of a continual town meeting going on.

Q. It seems to me there's a valid point that's been lost somewhere here. A great part of the time, perhaps due to the fact that frustration is inevitable, there are power struggles. Let's acknowledge this first, and then your idea of neighbourhoods can be talked about in terms of more available power.

A. That's right.

Q. Somebody almost inevitably is going to be holding that power, some one person or small group.

A. I don't see why that follows. What was the idea of our federal system to begin with ?

Q. What happened though ?

A. Well, yes, did it have to happen ? You're saying it had to happen.

Q. Just a pure empirical argument: it does happen.

A. But that isn't altogether true. We tend to be very blind to those cases where it hasn't been true. Let's take the history of science. Up to the last thirty years, you'll find that science has been run in an international and completely decentralised way. Perfectly. There've been scientific academies, there've been universities that co-operated. They've advanced science by leaps and bounds; each little group has been in charge of its funds. And there hasn't been much of an attempt by anybody to dominate from above.

Q. I'm going to pick on this one, because I don't think you have a valid example, simply because there isn't much conflict of basic personal importance.

A. Oh, the devil that's so !

Q. Well, maybe there wasn't any need for this degree of organisation before ?

A. Scientific work has been extremely organised. I never said it wasn't organised. In every country there were academies of science, conventions, publications. The organisation was immense, but there was no

power struggle in the sense of some group struggling for centralised domination.

Q. There wasn't any need for a power struggle.

A. There never is any need for a power struggle. This is a neurosis.

Q. But today big organisations are giving out the money, and if you want any part in research in science you have to have money, and you have to have it from the people who control it ?

A. That's right. In other words, what's happening is that we are interfering with this great history of science with goals that are not the ideals of science. But centralisation does not have to happen. It's a style exactly the way baroque was a style. In fact it is a baroque style, as Lewis Mumford points out. That's just what baroque planning is: in the middle is the big palace and all the rays come from the centre.

Q. You think though that this is not necessary either in science or in the planning of a neighbourhood, that we could choose to do otherwise ?

A. Choose is too strong a word because choose gives the idea that you can get out of your skin. I think that we could edge in directions where it would become less necessary to do it this way. Let's put it that way. By creating other kinds of small institutions, we can take the venom out of the centralised institution. You have to fight against it with ideas of alternative activities. You can't fight against it with words, thought, a beatnik withdrawal. A beatnik withdrawal, however, is not a bad first step. To stop is often a very good step. Just to stop, in the beatnik way. You just won't do it. Then maybe you will think of something else to do.

Q. What kind of children would come out of the dormitory situation you propose ?

A. What I was proposing was the family structure of the Kibbutz, and the psychological theory behind it was Freudian. The trouble that leads to the Oedipus complex is the problem of the good and bad mother. The aim of the kibbutz is to make the mother only the good mother; that is, she teaches you nothing. She doesn't teach you table manners, you learn table manners from society. But when society gets too rough then you can run home crying and mama comforts you.

Q. I've heard some conflicting things about the effects that the kibbutz has had on children.

A. That's why I said to begin at age eleven. It seems beyond doubt that if a child is brought up, especially from the age of about six months to two years, without personal attention, he develops a cold personality which may eventually become a psychopathic personality. In Israel it was not implicit in the notion that the child should not get individual attention; they placed the child in the (nursery of the) kibbutz too early because they needed the woman's work in the fields.

Q. I wonder when you talk about putting the children in a dormitory like that. I would not want to give my children up to someone else ?

A. You're living in a dream world, dear. Wait till you have children. You'll find that your children get their standards from the street and not from you.

Q. Well, if they are still living at home and I have some influence on their lives, I might be able at least to modify the standards of the street. But if they are off somewhere else, I can't control them at all ?

A. Yes, that's true. But even then if the standards you have at home are really more worthwhile and, what is more important, interesting, the child will get something from them even though he lives in the dormitory. But if we take the average situation, I think that almost any street situation is better than most family situations with regard to standards, culture, or love. Moreover, there is no such thing as absolute power over a child anyway.

Q. You mentioned something about the importance of interest. Why does it have this importance ?

A. I'll tell you why. There are some things that have to be done against people's wills, but we do them at peril. For instance, if a child drifts out into the traffic you get him by the ne ck and swat the tar out of him so that he learns his lesson. But every time that's done or a child is made to do something which isn't interesting to him, he is going to do it with less grace and talent; that is, less of himself, initiated from inside, is going to be involved in it. So insofar as we're interested in the perfection of everybody's life, we must try as much as we can to have a basis of spontaneous interest for anything that is done. The reason is that it will be done better, more accurately, with more grace, more intelligence, and more force.

Q. Would there be adult supervision in these dormitories ?

A. If I were running them there would not be. There would be rules, for there is a necessity for structure. The kids would not be left completely to their own devices, for I would combine the dormitory system with a form of urban renewal which would attempt to give the kids the kinds of jobs which adolescents can do, such as renovation. The kids would not be neglected by adults, for if one comes over to a man working and watches, the man will talk to him. And they will be paid for working in the urban renewal programme. Isn't this what happens in a primitive culture: Youth House and community work ?

Q. You mentioned that with local planning there might be tremendous messes. What would happen ? People might think that planning was a terrible idea and public opinion might become so strong that the planning could not be carried through.

A. That's right. That's exactly what happened to progressive education when they began to try it. So that instead of giving it a real try, things stopped at the level of minor messes and then panic.

Q. Well what would you suggest doing about this ?

A. I would suggest more courage.

Q. If power is given to the small group, who is going to lead its members ?

A. The people who are wiser, compassionate.

Q. How are they going to establish themselves in this group ?

A. Well now look. Let's pretend for a moment that since I'm sitting here at the head of the table, I'm wiser. How have I established

myself ? It's not the physical plan of the room. There is no other answer, except that I care. I care enough to think about it; I care enough to write an article; I care enough to talk about it to other people who know something about it.

Q. Is there anything beside courage that might serve to overcome panic ?

A. Well perhaps motivational research might serve the same function at this level; that is you use sociological and psychological techniques not in order to put something into the person, but in order to get rid of those things which prevent him from being himself. In psychotherapy we call this unblocking. Thus we might use motivational research to get people out of the idea that planning can't be done. That would be quite sufficient. Then I would rather let nature take its course, so that the community is natural. I really deeply think so.

Q. Somewhere you have described yourself as an anarchist. What do you mean by that ?

A. I'm for diminishing the exercise of coercive authority as much as possible. I don't think there's any anarchist thought at present which is interested in a total revolution of society or has any picture of a total society. The aim in general is to turn involuntary organisations into voluntary organisations, to turn as much as possible the pre-organised into the spontaneously organised. To remove as far as possible the principle of fear as a strong force in human relations so that other feelings will emerge, such as anger, love, excitement, interest.

Q. I don't understand what you would do, if, for instance on a small community level the majority of the members decide to do this or that, and an individual or a few individuals are outvoted.

A. In principle in a good society things would not be put to a vote. If there was disagreement nothing would be done. The matter would not be tabled forever, because people would keep attempting to understand the others' point of view, for the motives of all would be trusted. But frequently things can be decided fairly easily. Suppose you go out with a few friends and one says let's go to this movie and another says let's go to a different movie. How is it decided ?

Q. You vote.

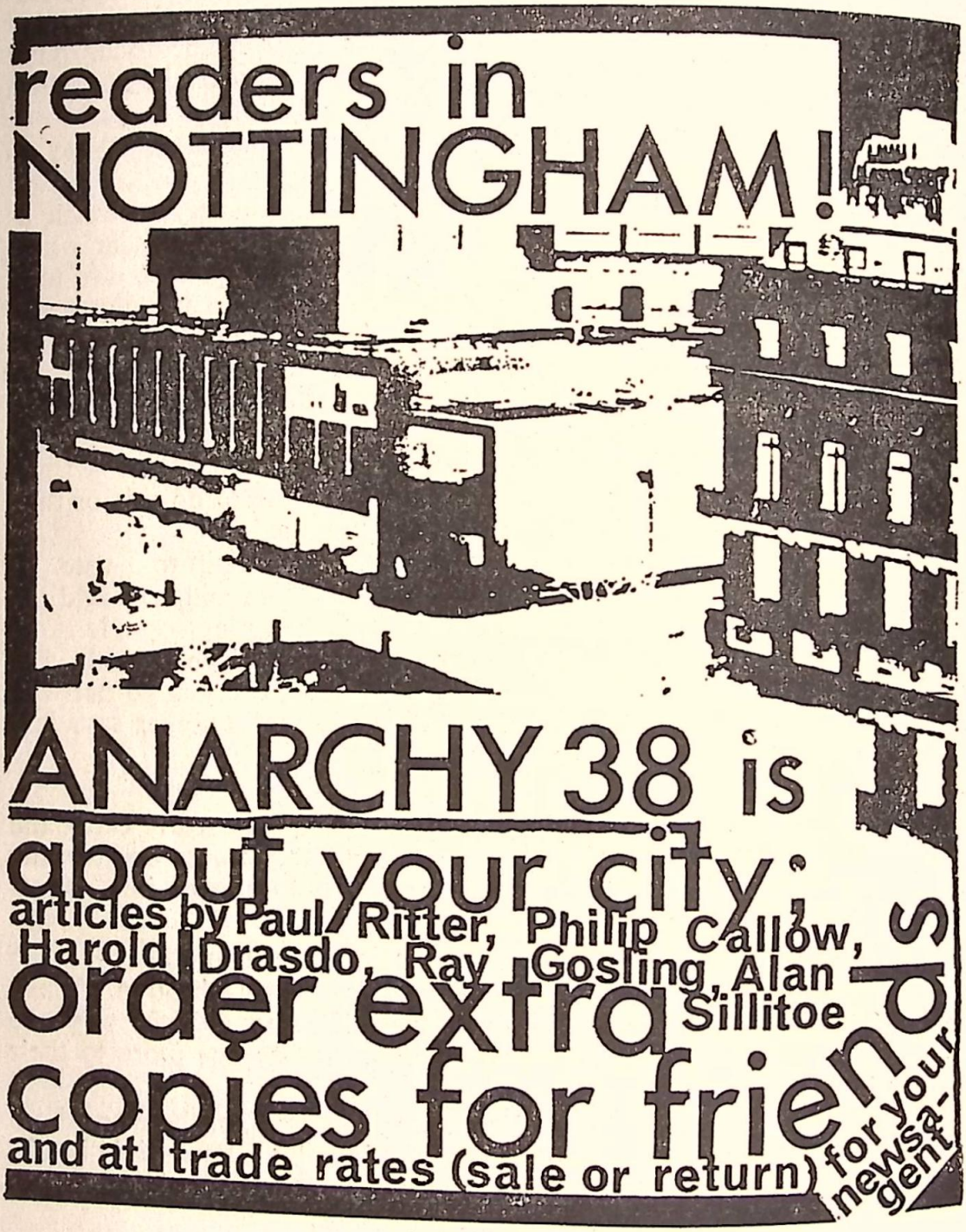
A. Oh, you do not. What happens is that somebody really cares and really wants to go to a particular movie, and the others don't really care that much and say OK. Isn't that what would happen in a society where people trust one another ?

Q. But people don't always have the same set of principles.

A. That's right. And that's another reason for decentralisation. When you have a decentralised system, those who disagree with the way one neighbourhood is run can pack up and find another one more to their liking.

Q. To get back to the criticism of your work as utopian, there are those who say that people spend a lot of time talking about impossible ideals, the utopias if you will, and that this keeps them from getting down to the things which actually might be accomplished.

A. I think that there is a false estimate of the general public involved here. The basis of this sort of criticism is the conception that the average man does not have profound ideals, that he doesn't have high hopes and castles in the air. In fact, the more simple people are, the more they tend to go in for future thinking. But because there is so much potential conflict in such ideas, the people who want to get elected soft-pedal them. It is a matter of how people really are, and therefore of what is *really* feasible.



In several issues of ANARCHY *we have sought to explore the possibilities of popular intervention in the outrage of homelessness: in* ANARCHY 24 *on Housing and Helplessness we analysed the significance of the post-war squatters' movement, in* ANARCHY 26 *Brian Richardson discussed the relationship between demonstrations and direct action over the bomb and over other social issues like housing, illustrating this with the example of the London Committee of 100's demonstration at Newington Lodge, the LCC reception centre, and in* ANARCHY 35 *on House and Home we discussed the significance of the demonstration over the Cobb eviction in Paddington, in which the Committee of* 100 *and the London anarchists participated. We publish below an account by J. D. Gilbert-Rolfe of the Tunbridge Wells Anarchist Group of another eviction, and of the action taken by the local Committee of* 100 *which brought enough publicity and public interest to ensure that* someone *was sufficiently concerned to make a home for the evicted family. We don't want to exaggerate the significance of this kind of intervention: what it* does *exemplify is a different standard of values, a different kind of public concern, a conviction that "the society I live in is mine."*

Story of an eviction

J. D. GILBERT-ROLFE

LATE LAST YEAR A MEMBER OF TUNBRIDGE WELLS COMMITTEE OF 100 was approached by a woman whose dustbin he was emptying, who asked him if he knew of a vacant flat or small house she and her family could rent. From the conversation which ensued, it transpired that she —let us call her Mrs. Smith—had been living, with her husband (then recovering from a road accident in which the small truck indispensible to his "general dealer" business had been smashed up, thus putting him out of work) and their two children, in this house, working for the owner-occupier, an old woman, as housekeeper and getting board for her family in exchange. The old woman had gone into hospital and sold the house and, since they had no rent book and were therefore not legal tenants they had become trespassers overnight, and were threatened with eviction. The motor accident had been a severe blow to their income and the new owners had cut off the electricity.

The story was brought up at the next local Committee of 100 meeting and we decided to set up a sub-committee to deal with it. Over the next three months we were in constant touch with the Smiths and went to see the local council for them several times. The Council would do nothing, saying that the Smiths had not been on the waiting list for a council house long enough. There were 1,300 on the waiting list already, and six or seven were in a position *more desperate than that of the Smiths.* Anyway they weren't going to discuss it with the Committee of 100; it wasn't our business. Then a Labour councillor (and Parliamentary candidate) was approached. He went to see the Smiths and then saw the council's Housing Committe. He endorsed the Committee's decision to put the wife and children in West Malling "Rest Centre". By now the owner's solicitors were securing an eviction order. The Smiths, who represent a social strata peculiar to towns in rural areas—people who have been displaced from the farm labourer jobs by machinery and have consequently come into the nearby towns, which have little or no industry and therefore no jobs—had not

appeared in court to contest the eviction order and it was secured against them for 12 noon on January 8th. We decided to mount a demonstration.

Accordingly 500 leaflets were printed, giving a history of the case. On the day before the eviction was due to take place the Housing Committee turned down the case for the second time. Plans were made to squat the family in an empty house if it were willing. (A list had been drawn up a month before of houses for which the Council could have secured Ministerial permission for compulsory purchase if it had so wished.) The night before the eviction the street was leafleted and the press and Southern Television were notified.

By 11.30 in the morning the demonstration had started. The TV cameras and reporters were there and by 12 noon about 30 Committee of 100 supporters were standing under the banner hung from a first floor window, holding hastily made posters. Bailiffs walked up and down the road looking worried and a crowd began to collect. Statements to TV and Press were made. A policeman came up and said he wanted a spokesman to come and talk with him. Feeling flattered we asked him to talk to all of us. He looked annoyed and said that after all there would be no eviction that day. After about 1.30 people had started going back to work and the demonstration had dwindled to six people when the bailiff and several policemen came and forced the window open and evicted the family at 4.15. We had kept them off for nearly five hours.

A crowd of neighbours—housewives with children—now began pouring abuse on the police at the top of their voices. We engaged the bailiffs in a long wrangling dispute lasting till six o'clock. By six all the family's possessions were out and piled on a small van. They had five shillings and sixpence. The whole thing had brought them down and they didn't want to squat in any empty house so after settling their dogs in the local RSPCA kennels we held hurried collections among ourselves to pay for bed and breakfast accommodation for them.

At this stage, Jim Spellman, a man unknown to us, turned up at the house where we had taken the Smiths for tea and said that we had been sent by the workers from the local telephone exchange to see if we needed money. This was terrific and actually solved our problem eventually, since we have been paying their rent in one room with the money he and his fellow-workers provided, plus money contributed by the Society of Friends and collected elsewhere. And now Jim Spellman has managed to find the Smiths somewhere to live—half his own house!

This demonstration has proved one thing at least to the local council: that what it claims it can't do, with all its resources, can be done by an organisation such as the Committee of 100, with working class support, and as long as it can be done, it will be done.

The writer would be glad to receive details of housing in other parts of Kent and Sussex with a view to publishing a full report on the situation, and is grateful to those who have sent him information from Margate.

Pilkington vs. Beeching

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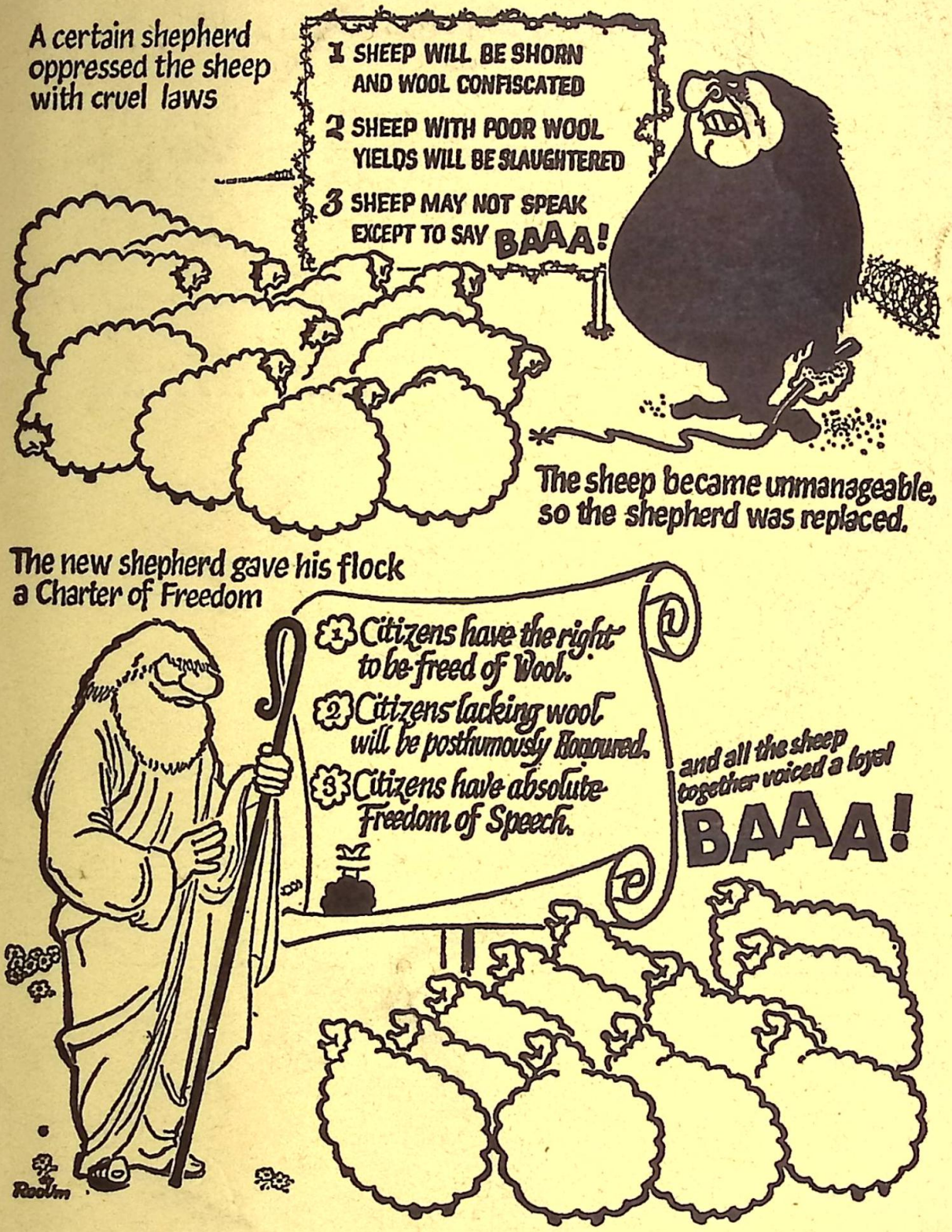
A certain shepherd oppressed the sheep with cruel laws
1 SHEEP WILL BE SHORN AND WOOL CONFISCATED
2 SHEEP WITH POOR WOOL YIELDS WILL BE SLAUGHTERED
3 SHEEP MAY NOT SPEAK EXCEPT TO SAY BAAA!
The sheep became unmanageable, so the shepherd was replaced.
The new shepherd gave his flock a Charter of Freedom
1 Citizens have the right to be freed of Wool.
2 Citizens lacking wool will be posthumously Honoured.
3 Citizens have absolute Freedom of Speech.
and all the sheep together voiced a loyal
BAAA!
Roolm